

INTERPRETATION OF THE PHELPS CREEK PETROGLYPH: WAS MRS. GODDARD SPLAY-FOOTED?

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Introduction

In the late 1960s, while employed by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History to conduct their archaeology program, I visited Camp Whitewood on Phelps Creek, near Windsor Mills, in Ashtabula County. This was the location of a prehistoric earthwork cutting across a narrow promontory overlooking the gulf of Phelps Creek. According to Ohio Historic Preservation Office records, the site, known as the Windsor Mills Fort and Village Site, was examined by Emerson Greenman in 1929. In the 1980s the "fort" received some additional attention (Lee 1987) but the most specific information found in the published literature seems to be brief statements by Belovich and Brose (1992: 17-18) and Belovich (1998: 176) that it is one of three such hill-top enclosures in northeastern Ohio yielding "but few artifacts and no evidence for a deep village midden." Recovered artifacts were limited to small amounts of lithic debitage and three cordmarked grit-tempered body sherds. While the number of such sites is certainly debatable, for there are certainly far more than three such in the region, the description of 33-Ab-3 as lacking a deep midden and yielding very few artifacts is correct. Since it was precisely abundant midden and artifacts that William E. Scheele, then Cleveland Museum director wanted, no further study of the Windsor Mills Site was possible at the time, but I was told of a petroglyph that had formerly existed on the brink of the high waterfall on Phelps Creek. Many years later I learned that the carvings were still in existence and had been mounted above a fireplace mantle in the Camp Whitewood Lodge. Seasonally restricted access to the camp and other constraints have prevented me from examining the actual carvings.

"Foot-print Rock"

Recently, however, I obtained a postcard photograph of "Foot-print Rock in its Old Location" at Camp Whitewood. It bears a 2 cent coil Jefferson postage stamp first issued in 1954, which suggests a *terminus ante quem* date for the postcard and photograph, although this particular stamp was used for many years after 1954, into the 1980s. The photo shows what appears to be a rather larger pair of drastically splayed feet, sur-

rounded by a plethora of carved initials. Nonetheless, I assumed these to be prehistoric petroglyphs similar to carvings of human hands and feet found at several petroglyph sites throughout Ohio, for prehistoric petroglyph sites are often marred by the accretion of more recent carvings (e.g., Adams County petroglyphs, Swauger 1984:13).

In researching the history of this petroglyph, however, I soon found a website about Camp Whitewood which includes numerous excerpts from a history by John P. Parker, Professor Emeritus, Ohio State University Extension. According to Parker's research, "Sometime in the late 1800's, a young couple from Orwell, Mr. and Mrs. Will Goddard, were picnicking at Warner's Hollow. Mr. Goddard had his wife stand barefoot on a wet cloth, then on the rock. He drew around the wet prints with a pencil and then, with a small mallet and chisel, made the realistic footprints. Residents in the Orwell and Windsor areas in the 1800's generally were aware of the origin of the footprints."

Further, "About 1950, someone decided they wanted the footprints from the rock. They were chiseled out of the rock and stolen. Because of their historical importance, a reward was offered for their return by Mr. Tom White. As a result, the individual taking the footprints returned them, the reward was donated to the camp, and the footprints are now located in the Grindstone Creek Lodge and Conference Center."

The identity of Mr. and Mrs. Will Goddard is easily confirmed by federal census records. William F. Goddard (1853-1929) is listed as a farmer in Orwell Township in 1900 along with wife Wilmot (1858-1930) and three children. Mr. Goddard's other chief claim to fame is a patented hay-elevator and carrier (U.S. Pat. No. 206, 104), patented at the age of 25 in 1878, and, together with his brother Roland (1841-1907), a patented machine for weaving basket-blanks (U. S. Pat. No. 691, 621) in 1902.

Interpretation

Footprint impressions are relatively common on Ohio prehistoric petroglyph sites but are often so generic as to leave the interpreter guessing whether they represent human feet or ursid paws (Swauger 1974: 98; Murphy 2009). The Camp Whitewood

footprints are clearly intended as human, however. While it would be interesting and desirable to examine these carvings closely to determine any existing distinctions between them and documented prehistoric examples, such a project is hampered by seasonal and physical inaccessibility of the Camp Whitewood carvings and the heavy degree of weathering that has affected known prehistoric examples.

Some may question the ready acceptance of what is essentially oral tradition in assigning these carvings an Historic age when many authorities previously urge caution in accepting modern-day Native American interpretation of petroglyphs based on oral tradition, but there are several considerations. The present oral tradition goes back no further than one or two generations and has been maintained by local inhabitants who have remained in the area for generations. Furthermore, there is no religious interpretation or political motive that might cloud the issue of the origin of the Camp Whitewood petroglyph. The Camp Whitewood carvings are much more realistic in depiction than comparable prehistoric examples, which would accord with the method described for their production. Finally, no known prehistoric examples display the remarkable splay-footedness shown by the Camp Whitewood petroglyph.

If deemed prehistoric or historic aboriginal, no doubt there would by now be romantic Running Bear-type explanations of the location of these footprints at the top of a cliff, perhaps even imaginings of prehistoric Aztec - or Inca-like human sacrifice, explanations just as culturally insensitive and demeaning as the possible over-interpretations of these rock carvings as Historic artifacts. Did Mr. Goddard have a foot fetish? (Not enough evidence). Did Mrs. Goddard have rather big feet and walk splay-footed? (Again, not enough evidence, though I can't help being reminded of Dr. Olaf Prufer's fond and perhaps overly-frequent use of the axiom "If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck...") Perhaps the best interpretation is to interpret all such objects with caution - even as to whether they are prehistoric or Historic - and not overload them with cultural, sociological or psychological preconceptions.

References

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Figure 1 (Murphy) The Phelps Creek petroglyph.